

## MUSING ON MARVIN MALONE

An interviewer once asked Sammy Cahn, the great songwriter, if he ever wrote a song with Frank Sinatra in mind, because Sinatra had recorded many of his lyrics. Cahn said he wrote almost every song with Sinatra in mind, because if Sinatra didn't sing it, there were so many who imitated Sinatra that there was an excellent chance of the song being picked up.

There's an analogy there for me when I think of Marvin Malone. I don't think I wrote poems with him in mind exactly, but I did send just about all of my poems to him first. I was pretty confident that most of the poems would eventually be picked up by some editor, but I wanted Marvin to have first choice. I suppose that over the years his taste might have had an influence on some of the things I wrote, but more important to me was the discovery of someone out there with whom I shared so much. So I'll go back to the analogy. Marvin Malone was the Frank Sinatra of poetry editors, just as Frank Sinatra was the Marvin Malone of pop singers, in my opinion.

Marvin Malone once told me I was a "good dirty poet." That is a compliment I cherish.

—Charles Stetler

Columbia, SC

## MARVIN MALONE

(for Shirley and Christa Malone)

Antiquarian booksellers know their customers just partially but perhaps in ways no one else can fully appreciate. We do not function as priest and rarely take confession, though some confidences we share. Our stores are rarely conduits of sexual energy. But witness we are to emotional life and intellectual commitment. I have always believed that book people are usually indirect in their personal relationships. A wise friend once observed—and I believe the expression is more succinct than any other—that book dealers solve problems caused by books. But what of book "collectors" (a word I mistrust)? What do they do for themselves and for others?

My earliest records (imperfect) note that Marvin Malone



bought an inscribed Fritz Leiber from Serendipity Books at a book fair in 1972. Thereafter, I invoiced Marvin as many as 12 times in one year but on the average just 6 times a year, and not at all in 1975, 1977, and 1996 (the year of his death). The sums Marvin paid were never great, individually considered, and he was clearly on a modest budget. He would pay off invoices regularly, without fail. So Marvin was consistent, not theatrical. Modest. Quiet, as in soft-spoken. He blinked a lot. He would appear unannounced and very irregularly, sometimes with Shirley. It was unclear if I was the intended goal of the day (we booksellers always wish for that); in Marvin's case, perhaps not. He did not mind being shown this or that, but he preferred to be left alone. Over the years I was allowed to guess at what was on his mind. I'm good at that. Re books, anyway.

I knew from the beginning, then, that post-war science fiction intrigued Marvin. He was systematic and gathered by author, so in the end he had most of the books by each of the authors he liked, in first printing, in dust jacket, fine.

Similarly, with detective fiction, Marvin bought contemporary work, the better writers English and American whom everyone else was buying also. Here again, Serendipity was no special contributor to a significant creation. Marvin picked and chose, asked for nothing, left no want list.

In conventional current fiction Marvin gathered unsystematically. One finds Bowles and Burroughs, James D. Houston and Wright Morris, Wyndham Lewis and Henry Miller. The reach in time is slightly more backward, the choices very personal. As Shirley is a painter, art and photography books abound. Here the responsibility is historical: good books of good images, not bought for rarity but for reference.

With poetry, Marvin's focus was more intense. He wrote poetry, albeit without a single pretension and in modes that guaranteed anonymity. But he published poetry. Lots of it. He edited the work of more than 750 poets, corresponded with the respective authors, and published them in WORMWOOD. Inevitably, he gathered their books, and these are often warmly and genuinely inscribed. These authors became Marvin's friends, if friends by mail. They were often ever so faithful and generous in return for Marvin's gift of time. Attention to poetry in terms of vast chunks of time, money, and mental energy dominated Marvin's life from 1961 to 1996. He would not relinquish the responsibility.

As a book collector active to his own purposes in these areas, Marvin had dignity. But in a single regard he was unique,



unparalleled. For he collected the alternative literary magazines of his own time. Almost all of them. Systematically, relentlessly, religiously. I have before me Marvin's want list of specific missing issues for 304 little mags. I do not know which or how many little magazines he completed to date. Marvin was the only man I ever met who tried, who took responsibility for the whole, alone. Very alone.

Who was this man Marvin Malone? Or, who was this book collector Marvin Malone? In trying to answer, I am trying to explain the part of the man I think I knew to his own family. He was a reserved man, and a busy one. Marvin did not have time on his hands but, rather, a self-imposed workload and intellectual commitments, compartmented, that were concealed from the bookseller and others. He certainly did not have time for drink or tobacco—or even baseball. I did not know until after his death about the 200 pharmacological papers Marvin wrote, about his academic extra-curricular service. I talked with him only briefly about his outreach activities in advising youth about the dangers of drugs.

I chronicle his travels now, realizing that there were 75 Serendipities in his life. Though ever limited by a modest professional income, Marvin yet knew Jimmy Lowell and Henry Wenning and Peter Joliffe, and Gary Oleson and Franny Ness, and Bob Wilson and Bill Pieper and Otto Penzler and David Wirshup. He was a-building. Yes, he was secretive. Or, rather, unforthcoming. Marvin chuckled. I never saw him angry. Of course, he had not read all his books. But none had been acquired for their appreciation potential. Like many, Marvin collected his own time, the portion that reflected his own mind. There is one striking feature of Marvin's library: the absence of academia. Science fiction, mysteries, fantasy, cartoon art, mimeographed little magazines, the counter culture, alternative thought. He kept his books clean, cupboarded. They were the context and structure that enabled him to think and function: draw, edit, correspond. These are the solitary—not lonely—pursuits of the mind. At considerable expense to current relations, Marvin confidently maintained the bridge from the past he inherited from education, and he kept on building many bridges into the future. With literature, privately. Booksellers have many customers. Very few are sustained, incorrupt, by books. One such bookman was Marvin Malone.

—Peter B. Howard, Serendipity Books  
Berkeley, CA